

Research Tips

From the Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory
at Virginia Commonwealth University's Center for Public Policy

No. 3

April 2001

Research conducted for the Virginia HIV Community Planning Committee

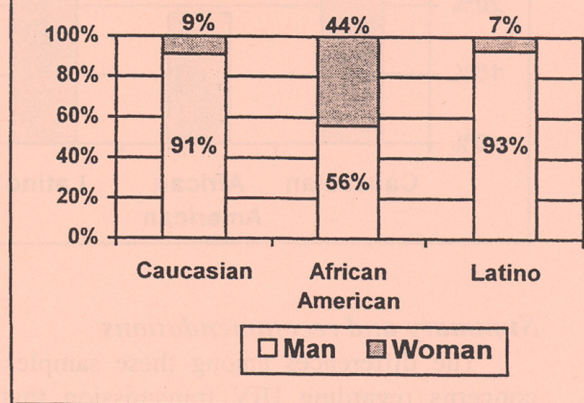
African American, Latino and Caucasian men who have sex with men differ in perceptions and behaviors relevant to HIV/AIDS

African American men who have sex with men (MSM) reported higher levels of drug use in connection with sexual activity and higher levels of bisexual behavior than Latino and Caucasian MSM, while Latinos were least likely to know the HIV status of their last sex partner. Latinos and African Americans reported higher frequencies of paid sex than Caucasians and less frequent association with organized groups of gays, lesbians and bisexuals. These characteristics may indicate that Latino and African American MSM are particularly at risk for HIV infection and that HIV/AIDS education and prevention programming may need to adopt more culturally sensitive frameworks.

The results of two surveys conducted by the Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory at Virginia Commonwealth University indicate differences between African American, Latino and Caucasian men who have sex with men (MSM) in perceptions of their sexuality and behaviors that may affect their risk of contracting HIV.

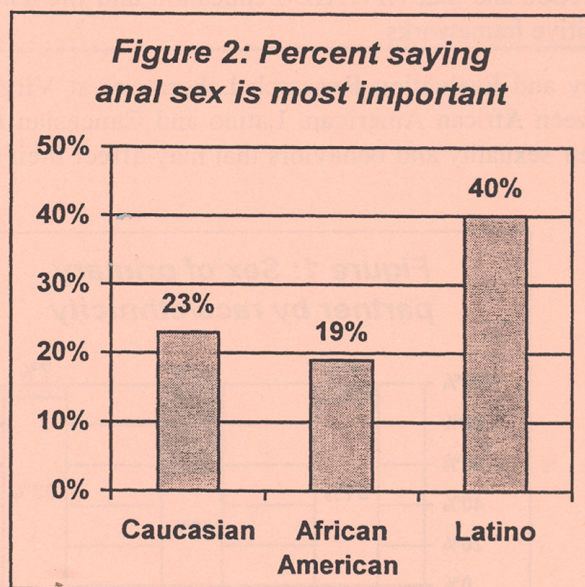
- Figure 1 shows that of African American MSM, 44% reported being in a primary relationship with a woman, compared to less than 10% of the Caucasians and Latinos.
- Of Latinos and African Americans, 24% - 29% said they had paid or been paid for sex, about double the rate for Caucasians.
- Of Latino MSM, 43% said they did not know the HIV status of their last sex partner, compared to 28% of African Americans and 23% of Caucasians.
- More African American MSM said that they were attracted to women and fewer identified themselves as homosexual or gay. Whereas 61% and 64% of Latinos and Caucasians, respectively, said they were sexually attracted only to men, only 34% of African Americans reported this exclusivity. While 79% of Caucasians and 65% of Latinos expressed a gay identity, only 47% of the African Americans expressed this identity.

Figure 1: Sex of primary partner by race/ethnicity



- African American MSM in this sample reported the highest rate of HIV infection, with 32% of those having been tested saying they were HIV positive, compared to 19% of Caucasian MSM and 16% of Latino MSM.

- More than 70% of all groups reported using alcohol before or during sex at least occasionally. African Americans were more likely to report ever using drugs, other than alcohol, before or during sex, 41%, compared to 33% of Latinos and 28% of Caucasians.
- Anal sex was much more important to Latino MSM. Figure 2 shows that of Latinos, 40% agreed that "anal sex is the most important form of sex to me" compared to 19% of African Americans and 23% of Caucasians.
- Caucasian MSM were most likely to say they have been associated with a group made up of gays/lesbians/bisexuals, 76% compared to 45% of Latinos and 35% of African Americans.
- Of Latinos, 44% reported sexual abuse as children, compared to 37% of African Americans and 28% of Caucasians.



Summary and recommendations

The differences among these samples raise concerns regarding HIV transmission that may need to be dealt with in HIV prevention programming:

- Communication with sex partners about HIV status is critical and needs to be stressed. Especially among Latinos who reported in higher proportions not knowing the HIV status of their last sex partner, communica-

Study Methodologies

Complex nonprobability methodologies were used in both surveys. The survey of Caucasian and African American MSM was completed in 1997. Data were collected through organizations and social networks, bars and clubs, and public events. Posters, information cards, and ads provided for toll-free telephone completion.

The Latino MSM survey, conducted in 1999 in Northern Virginia, Richmond and Hampton Roads, gathered data through organizations, social networks, bars, clubs and public events, and in home parties. Most surveys were completed in Spanish.

Snowball techniques, where information about the research was passed by participants to others in their social networks, were used in both projects.

The survey of Virginia MSM resulted in a sample of 428 Caucasian men and 198 African American men. The survey of urban Latino MSM resulted in a sample of 291 men.

tion related to safer sexual practices may be emphasized

- The risks to female partners may need to be addressed, given the frequency of bisexual behavior, particularly among African American MSM.
- The apparent strong preference of Latinos for anal sex presents the need to stress safer alternatives and protective behavior.
- The frequency of reported sexual abuse during childhood, especially among Latino MSM, indicates the need for attention to this factor, shown to be associated with risky sexual behavior in adult Latino MSM.
- Latino and African American MSM may be more socially isolated than Caucasians from other MSM. Since social relationships have been found to support safer sex, programming needs to address the effects of such isolation.

For more information about this and other HIV/AIDS related research, contact the SERL at (804) 828-8813, 921 W. Franklin St., VCU, Richmond, VA 23284-3065, or at <http://www.vcu.edu/srl>. This project was directed by Dr. S. Lisbeth Jarama and this report designed and written by Dr. J. David Kennamer.